

IN BETWEEN SUPERPOWERS: LIMINALITY AND WESTERNIZATION IN WEI HUI'S *SHANGHAI BABY* (1999)

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ABSTRACT

Shanghai Baby (1999), a novel by Wei Hui, tells the story of a Shanghai woman named Coco who is caught between two superpowers: China and the West, personified by the characters Tian Tian, a native Chinese man with no passion for life, and Mark, a white German man who is dominant in every way. This study aims to identify the tension experienced by both Coco and the novel *Shanghai Baby* in such a liminal position through narrative content and reactions in the surrounding political economy and cultural discourse. Through a close reading of the text within the theoretical framework of Bhabha's (1994) concept of in-betweenness and Third-space, we argue that the liminality displayed within the text and based on the novel's highly Westernized narrative structure creates a liminal state for the novel. As such, while the narrative is set in China and it is originally written in Chinese, the novel represents Western ideological imagination, as underscored by its economic success in its translated form in English.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study discusses how gender and fiction intertwine in and around the novel *Shanghai Baby* (1999) by Wei Hui, a Chinese writer who studied in the city of Shanghai. These factors determine the position of Coco as the main female character in the novel who is caught between two superpowers: China and the West. The narrative unfolds in first-person, with the protagonist (Coco) wielding the narrative "I". Therefore, every dilemma and conflict found in this novel will be seen through the lens of the main character Coco. Meanwhile, these two colliding forces are personified by Tian Tian, a passionless Chinese man, and Mark, a dominant white German man with a successful career and romance. This power struggle between the two cultures of China and the West is portrayed through the internal struggles of the main female character (Coco), and the city in which the story is set (Shanghai), shown to be going through a gray phase also caused by the phenomenon of globalization in China.

The use of the word "Western" in contrast to Chinese culture and life in the novel is based on China's own view of the "Western" culture shown in the novel through Mark's character and the cultures seen coexisting in the city of Shanghai. China sees the West as a complete contradiction of Chinese culture and norms (Scarborough, 1998). It is significant to mention that the perception of Western culture can differ based on generations in China. The



younger generation, who have been exposed more to globalization and technology with its accompanying Western influences, might view this culture positively. As seen in the narrative, the character of Coco's mother is an example of the past generation, she rejects Western culture, whereas Coco is the younger generation embracing Western culture in her daily lives. (Scarborough, p.21 1998). Below is a table summarizing the differences between Chinese and Western norms, and culture that Scarborough gathered in his study.

No	West	China
1.	Individual rights.	Individual duty and collective obligations.
2.	Rule by law.	Rule by personality and imperial authority.
3.	The collective right to grant, question, and reject political authority.	Unquestioning submission to hereditary authority backed by force.
4.	Politic and ethnic pluralism.	Monolithic power and homogeneity.
5.	Cultural interaction.	Cultural isolation.
6.	Sufficient resources to support early urbanization, specialization of labor, and large-scale trade.	An agrarian, subsistence economy and endless hardship, both natural and imposed.
7.	An external orientation.	An internal orientation.
8.	Physical and social mobility.	Permanence <i>in situ</i> .
9.	Reliance on reason and scientific method.	Reliance on precedent, intuition, and wisdom.
10.	An aggressive, active approach to nature, technology, and progress.	Passive, fatalistic submission.

(Scarborough, p.21 1998)

The journey of Coco's life as the main female character in *Shanghai Baby*, especially the adventure of her sexual life, is the focus of gender issues that arise in the novel. The oscillating sexual encounters with Tian Tian and Mark represent Coco's position as a Chinese woman who is in the middle between China and the West; not leaning towards either side. This confusing position makes Coco a woman without a definite position, a woman who is liberated from the dominant social narrative that dictates how women should behave.

This confusing position that Coco experiences in the everchanging space she lives in can be analyzed by using Homi Bhabha's ideas of the Third-space and liminality, or the in-between discussed in *The Location of Culture* (1994) to look at the various spaces marginalized groups are placed in and how they operate within these spaces. Bhabha's thinking offers a thoughtful perspective on the complexity of cultural identities and spaces that arise between dominant and marginalized cultures. The concept of the third space is rooted in cultural interaction, which emerges from the encounter of different cultures (Bhabha, 2012). It represents a space that transcends the boundaries of dominant culture and marginalized culture. Instead, the third space occupies a position where the norms and boundaries of dominant culture and marginalized culture intersect. It is in this hybrid space that new forms of cultural identity and production emerge.



The term liminality itself was first coined by Arnold van Gennep a folklorist, then developed by anthropologist Victor Turner in 1969 that finally established liminality as an important idea on understanding cultural experience (Barrow et al., 2020). The word liminality is like an umbrella term for states or experiences of transition and ambiguity in context of cultural experience, and usually shown as a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty of one self (Banfield, 2022; Beech, 2011; Chakraborty, 2016; Finlay-Jeffrey, 2020). Its flexibility give people the freedom to use the concept on so many different topics and field of study (McIntyre, 2012).

Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baobei*, published in 1999 in China and translated into English by Bruce Humes as *Shanghai Baby* in 2001, has an interesting story behind its success. Forty thousand copies of the novel were burned and then deprived of publication rights by Chinese authorities in April 2000 (Freeman, 2005). The reason for the burning and banning was that Wei Hui's writings in *Shanghai Baobei* were deemed to be a blot on the culture and integrity of Chinese literary tradition. The Chinese government labeled *Shanghai Baobei* as 'pornography' and 'spiritual' pollution to the minds of its people (Lu, 2011). However, it was this rejection by the state that made Wei Hui's prestige in China skyrocket among the masses, and which later forced her to go into exile in New York. The novel *Shanghai Baby* then returned to the black market in China where it caught the attention of readers in the West and became an International Bestseller, translated into 34 languages (Song, 2016).

Wei Hui's debut novel, with the controversy surrounding it, became a kind of bible for Wei Hui as a benchmark for writing future works. The extreme reaction that the novel received in her native country, as quoted from her interview with BBC UK, made Wei Hui censor and doubt herself in writing further works (Hui, 2001). However, she turned this into a motivation to write literary works that liberate women, which can be seen in her next work, *Marrying Buddha* (2005). The way Wei Hui wrote *Shanghai Baby* is also interesting in the way she uses a lot of Western influence not only for the content of the story but also in the way she structured the novel. Making the novel stand in a very confusing spot between Chinese literature and Western literature that talks about women's experiences living in Shanghai.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies focus on *Shanghai Baby* as a research object such as Weber's study which discusses the battle between the ideologies of Chinese collectivism and Western individualism in the younger generation of China and how they try to survive amid China's undergoing rapid changes in the era of globalization (Weber, 2002). Meanwhile, Aijun Zhu's study focuses on Chinese women writers caught between feminism, nationalism, and neocolonialism, and trying to negotiate the space for women's bodies amid economic and cultural globalization (Zhu, 2005). In her study, Song analyzes how the writers, despite their middle-class backgrounds, portray urban and educated female characters who challenge society's silence on women's desires and negotiate their identities within an ideological landscape. The dilemmas faced by Shanghai women, particularly in *Shanghai Baby*, are portrayed as rooted in life choices that marginalize them within conventional Chinese cultural norms (Song, 2016). Another study say that *Shanghai Baby* serves as a literary mirror that reflects the complexity of Shanghai's development, where the apparent freedom of career women coexist with constant reminders that



the city has been significantly shaped by Western influences (Chen, 2012). There is also Zhong's article on China's ambivalence towards *Shanghai Baby*, which explores the complex interactions between Western feminism and its Chinese counterpart in a nuanced historical context, criticizing Western feminism as incompatible with their society's values (ZHONG, 2006). According to Kuoshu, *Shanghai Baby* serves as a poignant depiction of the dilemmas faced by China's younger generation in this new era, encapsulating the struggle to harmonize traditional Chinese morals with the material desires brought by the West (Kuoshu, 2005). With all these previous studies, therefore, this study aims to fill gaps and highlight issues overlooked in previous research, focusing on identifying the liminal position present in both the narrative and structure of the novel.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a close reading of the novel carried out with the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory and cultural material, referring particularly to Bhabha's (1994) concept of the in-between or liminality which talks about a state of transition or being on the threshold between two cultural domains. To arrive at the results of the research we will start with several stages as follows: 1) determining the object of research; reading closely the object of research; finding issues to be discussed; 2) curating data according to needs; analyzing data with a cultural materialist approach and predetermined theories; 3) mapping and describing the results of the analysis; and 4) drawing conclusions. The data taken will be in the form of dialog, narration, and passages of stories based on the relevance and needs of the study.

We will classify the issues to be discussed into 3 parts; Coco and the people, Coco and Shanghai, and Shanghai Baby's liminality.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shanghai Baby (1999) comes amid China's rapidly changing economic and cultural landscape. Wei Hui, as a new generation of Chinese women writers, presents topics and issues that are considered a challenge to Chinese literary and cultural traditions in this novel. Bhabha's theory of liminality, draws on cultural and post-colonial studies, focusing on the in-between spaces, transitional phases, and hybridity (Bhabha, 2012). Liminal moments disrupt fixed notions of identity. This disruption is a form of resistance in itself, as it challenges the rigidity of established categories and allows for the exploration of alternative identities.

Individuals in liminality can resist conforming to predefined roles and expectations, embracing the fluidity and multiplicity of identity. The concept of liminality places individuals in an ambiguous and transitional state, distancing them from established norms. This space allows for freedom to shape a personal identity, empowering both individuals and communities with agency. It is a space where they can actively resist and negotiate their identities rather than passively accepting predefined roles. This agency allows for a more active form of resistance, where individuals contribute to the reshaping of cultural norms.



Coco and The People

This novel opens with Coco introducing herself with her real name followed by her nickname Coco, a very "western" name given to her by her friends, and she openly prefers this nickname to her real name because she admires the "French lady who lived to be almost ninety" (Hui, 2001:1) Coco Channel. She attributes this nickname to the fact that she lives in a very confusing city like Shanghai's "mystical fog" which allows Coco to create a new identity as she sees fit. Like Joan of Arc who initially called herself "Jehanne la Pucelle", which suggest Joan's bravery in relinquishing her position within the existing social hierarchy: she both hides her background while refusing to disavow it, underscoring the ambiguity surrounding her social standing (Osińska, 2023). By doing the same and making a new name of herself, it is implied that Coco wants to distant herself from the established order that she is in to create something new for herself without fully walking out from that order, which highlights the ambiguity of her identity.

Coco's liminality is manifested in the decisions and actions that she takes throughout her life. Starting from her relationship with her family, especially her mother, the romantic relationship she has with Tian Tian and Mark, consistently displays a liminal position that gives Coco's character layers in dealing with an environment that is also in transition. Bhabha's concept of liminality refers to the state of being in transition or in between different social, cultural, or political categories which Coco has been in her whole life. Caught between her family's traditional values and the more Westernized lifestyle, she juggles a double life between living with her boyfriend Tian Tian, and her secret lover Mark. The confusion and turmoil she experiences throughout the novel can also be seen in her interaction with other women in her life such as; her more "traditional" mother and her friend the "Westernized" Madonna.

Coco thinks about her mother as a "pretty, frail woman" (Hui, 2001:17) who works and lives for everyone's happiness above herself, and as time passes Coco cannot stop thinking about how different her life and her way of thinking are compared to her mother's because they are "separated by a hundred generations gaps...its a waste of time" (Hui, 2001:18) and that she wants a career and future of herself, which is to be a writer. It cannot be more different than her impression of Madonna, the madam she met in the middle of a bustling city like Shanghai, and her evident admiration is unmistakable in her monologue when she says Madonna's voice is "low and husky, like an actress of those Hollywood movies" (Hui, 2001:9).

In the novel Coco often talks about herself from two different perspectives using her family and her friends as her consciousness, talking about herself and her supposed identity. In accordance with the previous statement, coco through the judgment of her parents feels that she is different and cannot reach the standards that her mother expects of her. As in chapter three, her mother regards Coco as an "evil little thing devoid of conscience" (Hui, 2001:16). The use of the words "evil" and "devoid of conscience" gives a sense of disapproval and judgment towards Coco's character. The word "evil" also indicates a sense of disappointment with Coco's character and actions, which are not in line with the moral values and ethical expectations of her parents. This statement displays the complicated relationship between Coco and her parents, which is shown through the disconnect between her parents' values and norms and Coco's personality and lifestyle. This judgment from her parents has a significant impact on how Coco judges herself.



Then there is also an example of how men on the outside judge Coco. Coco is seen as a beautiful woman who is lovely to look at, as mentioned in the dialog "To most men, I qualify as little beauty, as pleasing as spring light on a lake's rippling surface" (Hui, 2001:16). The above dialog proves that men like Coco's appearance and the phrase "as pleasing as spring light on a lake's rippling surface" (Hui, 2001:16) gives Coco a fresh and pure impression, in stark contrast to her mother's description of coco as an "evil little thing" (Hui, 2001:16). Then the dialogue in which the men praising Coco's appearance and body by describing her as a Japanese cartoon with "oversize eyes" (Hui, 2001:16) and a long, majestic neck like "Coco Channel neck" (Hui, 2001:16) adds to the liminal value of Coco's character and how she sees herself. These two very different opinions place Coco in a liminal position with how she sees herself. These conflicting opinions then result in feelings of confusion, and internal conflict about her identity, which is seen in the sentence "What sort of person am I?" (Hui, 2001:16).

Throughout the whole novel, Coco always uses specific adjectives to describe or just talk about both Tian Tian and Mark. Coco's use of these adjectives suggests an unconscious tendency toward one of the sides while still being cautious not to offend the other. Coco will always describe Tian Tian as a fragile thing using words such as: slim and timid but not using it to offend or make fun of Tian Tian. Meanwhile, she uses these grand words to describe Mark and his body specifically: big hands, and huge organs, and makes a comparison of him to a "hunter confronting his longed-for prey" (Hui, 2001:57-58). This proves that even when Coco says she loves and treasures Tian Tian, she still cannot help meeting her unconscious needs and wants to search for more of someone or something different from what she used to. That collision between her conscious and unconscious thoughts puts her in a gray area, where she cannot choose between what she wants and what she needs.

The sexual relationship with her secret lover Mark, can be seen as Coco seeking for freedom from the expected norm of traditional relationship she has with Tian Tian, which repress her sexual desire. After knowing that Tian Tian cannot perform sexually, Coco started to doubt their relationship and whether she can stay with him or not. "Tian-tian just couldn't handle sex.... I remember the first time I held him in bed. When I discovered he was impotent, I was devastated... I didn't know if I could stay with him" (Hui, 2001:4). Her resistance to this hindrance in seeking sexual pleasure and is by having a non-committal sexual relationship with Mark, giving her the agency to choose and decide her own physical, emotional relationship. In Lebe Watson's study that talks about how female desire transcends societal norms that chained them to it. By analyzing female vampire and her queer relationship, Lebe argues that the female vampires resisting association with domestic ideals, such as forming a family, constitutes a rebellious act that establishes them as complete individuals, living beyond the societal and cultural norms imposed by patriarchy (Lebe Watson, 2023), which what is Coco doing in *Shanghai Baby*.

Further proven in Kuoshu's study which talks about the unexpected admiration for American culture within the novel that surprises the viewer. Within the context of *Shanghai Baby* the unexpected similarities between Coco's lifestyle and Western cultural enclaves, as observed by reviewer J. Stefan-Cole, extend to the complexities of her relationships. Coco's connection with the traditional man Tian Tian and her secret liaison with the "Western" lover



Mark align with the novel's overarching theme of cultural hybridity and blurred boundaries. The surprising admiration for American culture within Coco's social circle challenges preconceived notions about traditional Chinese values. Stefan-Cole's observations prompt reflection on the absence of anticipated Communist oppression, questioning whether Coco's experiences mirror Western contexts more than expected (Kuoshu, 2005). This narrative choice contributes to the novel's portrayal of a subculture within Shanghai that defies easy categorization.

With the data described above, Coco's relationship with the people around her becomes a symbol of liminality that is explored throughout the novel. Her relationship with her family, especially her mother and Tian Tian, represents the Chinese norms and values depicted in the novel. Coco's relationships with other men, her friends, and her secret relationship with Mark become a contrast that embraces more Westernized values. It is this difference in opinion and perception that underlines our research topic. The relationship between Coco and the people around her becomes the medium for the narrative in the novel to explain how cultural complexity produces the liminal feeling between traditional and modern that Coco experiences.

Coco and Shanghai

Coco's descriptions of Shanghai, encompassing its architecture, culture, and populace, serve as a reflective mirror of her own sentiments and self-perception. She describes how Shanghai is a perfect combination of two cultures merging, creating a new set of identities, and is perfect for people like her, she said "This air of superiority affects me: "I both love it and hate it" (Hui, 2001:1). As we have said before, liminality is a state that refers to being in the in-between location of cultural action (Chakraborty, 2016). In Gonzalez and Lopes study, they talk about the concept of liminality with pilgrimage landscape of The Way of St. James in Spain. They argue that liminality is a shifting and changing position that unites two states of being. Using the example of the pilgrims who feel a sense of liminality when they see the landscape of the Way that has natural and symbolic elements, which causes a feeling of ambiguity in the pilgrims (Lois González & Lopez, 2020).

If Tian Tian is the personification of Chinese traditional values and Mark is the total opposite of that, being the embodiment of modernity and the bringer of freedom to Western culture, then Coco is Shanghai. In her study, Scheen said that as the femme fatale and central figure in the novel, Coco becomes a living embodiment of the city, encapsulated in the titular 'Shanghai Babe' (Scheen, 2015). However, concurrently, she strives to transcend the city's inherent charm, declaring her own brilliance (Scheen, 2015). Criticizing Shanghai and saying its skyscrapers and buildings "long steel column pierces the sky, proof of the city's phallus worship" (Hui, 2001:14), as the way the city is still leaning towards its patriarchal culture. That feeling of liminality in Shanghai can be felt in how Coco describes and also marvels at its buildings and roads, always intertwining it with famous foreign places she can think of. She often speaks in nostalgia about how Shanghai has transformed into something so Western and modern.

In chapter four, entitled "The Seducer", Coco talks about Madonna's "retro theme party called Return to Avenue Joffre" (Hui, 2001:26). The use of the words "retro" and "return to Avenue Joffre" signifies a cross between the nostalgic and the contemporary. It is as if Avenue Joffre is something that has passed away. The party being held on the "top floor of the high-rise



at the corner of Huahai and Yandang roads" (Hui, 2001:26) also provides an important context between the traditional culture that is still significant in Shanghai's culture that has begun to shift towards a more modern direction.

The description of modern Huaihai road in the sentence "The cotton club is at the corner of Huaihai and Fuxing roads, the equivalent of New York's fifth avenue or the champs-elysees in Paris" (Hui, 2001:8), clearly represents Bhabha's concept of liminality which focuses on the transition of culture and space. Comparing Huahai Road, a historically significant place in the cities of Shanghai with other places in Western countries such as Fifth Avenue and Champ-Elysees shows clearly how the young generation of Shanghai embraces modern culture. The younger generation of Shanghai's nostalgic and retro emphasis on Shanghai's traditional places is a clear sign of how the culture in Shanghai continues to evolve "Avenue Joffre in the 1930s, Huaihai road today, has long symbolized Shanghai's old dreams" (Hui, 2001:26).

Coco describes the changing spaces in Shanghai not only as the end of an era but also the occasion for the emergence of a new culture, as "In today's fin-de-siecle, post-colonial mindset" (Hui, 2001:26). The *fin-de-siecle* period itself is a period characterized by social decline and the waiting for something new, encapsulating the profound shifts in societal norms and cultural paradigms (Schaffer & Wolfson, 2007). In this changing era, Shanghai has become a rubik's cube for the cultures that mingle in it. Like Romero's rubik's cube concept of how it represents identity and systems of domination (Rodó-Zárate & Jorba, 2022). This system illustrates how cultures compete with each other, and Shanghai in *Shanghai Baby* is a clear example of how the old culture gives way to the new through this system of domination.

The street serves as a canvas where historical dreams, manifested in "the bygone era of the revealing traditional dress, the qipao, calendar-girl posters, rickshaws, and jazz bands—is fashionable again"(Hui, 2001:26). This revival evokes a sense of nostalgia as she said in this dialogue "knotted over Shanghai's nostalgic heart"(Hui, 2001:26), creating cultural hybridity that challenges fixed categorizations and reflects Bhabha's emphasis on the in-between. The foreign and modern atmosphere of Huaihai road, which was specifically shaped to cater to the tastes of the new generation of Chinese, helped solidify Bhabha's concept of cultural adaptation and negotiation in Shanghai, cultures transform to challenge existing systems and boundaries, creating something entirely new and unique.

The way the old generation of Shanghainese live their lives with a set of routines and little to no money, and it will not matter because they live and depend on nostalgia because they still live in the communist mindset and culture. They have no desire for material things like what the youngster experiencing right now with the consumerist culture dominating. Meanwhile, the youngster slowly forgets the tradition and rejects the idea of a monotonous life "To the new generation, it's a place that's been rejected and will eventually be replaced; a lowly corned devoid of hope." (Hui, 2001:53). Thus, Coco shows her liminality in the way she still can empathize with the old Shanghainese people who are not willing to leave the old tradition while not wanting to live the same life.



Shanghai Baby's Liminality

Liminality in *Shanghai Baby* is immediately apparent from the title of the novel itself. The original title of this novel before it was translated into English was *Shanghai Baobei*. The mixed use of the English word "Shanghai" and the adapted word "Baobei" gives a very clear idea to the reader of the confusion this novel experiences. Just as Coco's liminality is immediately apparent from the first sentence of the novel's opening. Wei Hui vividly displays the confusion and uncertainty that the characters and the novel itself feel in the writing and narrative.

The author uses quotes from foreign artists, writers, and musicians in every chapter of the story, and none of them are from China. The fact the author decided to use quotes from foreign people to describe the story that she writes in Chinese creates a big ambivalence in the identity and the point that the novel is trying to convey. The author's decision not to incorporate direct quotations from famous individuals from China while narrating the experiences of a Chinese woman residing in Shanghai can be construed as a potentially inconsistent practice, carrying elements of hypocrisy. In the chapter "a Mother and a Daughter", the story that covers entirely the difficult relationship between a mother and a daughter living a very different life in a very different time and generation in Chinese society and culture, Wei Hui decided to quote Sigmund Freud for the opening. All those quotes at the start of all chapters can be used as a summary of the chapter it's in. Therefore, using foreign words from foreign people to summarize a story about a Chinese woman living her life in China is a very ambivalent way of conveying the meaning of the novel.

No	Quotes	Chapters
1.	Quote from Joni Mitchell (Canadian-American musician)	Encounter With My Lover
2.	Quotes from Jim Steinman (American composer) and Erica Jong (American novelist)	I Have a Dream
3.	Quotes from Elizabeth Taylor (British-American actress) and Flannery O'Connor (American novelist)	I Want to Succeed

In analyzing the three key chapters in *Shanghai Baby*, we can see how Bhabha's concept of liminality becomes the author's main focus in the narrative and message of the book. The opening chapter, "Encounter with my lover", presents a liminal space where Coco undergoes a significant transformation by giving up her regular job, supported by her parents, as a journalist and turning into a nightclub waitress. It is also in this club that Coco meets Tian Tian and reaffirms her identity through the romance she has with the Chinese man. The nightclub, being a symbol and a medium where different cultures merge and blend, provides a space for Coco to build and negotiate her identity. Meanwhile, the romantic and sexual relationship she has with Tian Tian provides a different freedom where Coco's desires are challenged and questioned.

The concept of liminality also highlights the process of Coco's search for her identity. Through the search for desire, both relationship and career, all of Coco's decisions put her in an



in-between position where she tries to find a middle ground between social expectations and personal aspirations. Coco's journey is described in this chapter through her experiences in the nightclub.

Using Joni Mitchell, the very famous female singer/songwriter as quoted from AllMusic (2011) "When the dust settles, Joni Mitchell may stand as the most important and influential female recording artist of the late 20th century" (Ankeny, 2011). Utilizing her philosophy to open the journey of this novel, her quote, "Well, there's a wide world of noble causes and lovely landscapes to discover, but all I really want to do right now is find another lover!" (Hui, 2001:1), perfectly encapsulates the novel direct approach to liminality. Like Mitchell, a female rock star who, in a male-dominated era, forged her own identity and became a musician more popular with women. She presented herself as "multidimensional and conflicted," forging a powerful connection with her female audience (Shumway, 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, it can be seen how *Shanghai Baby* conveys the indecision experienced by the main character and the book itself. This attribute doesn't just stop at the characters but also how the author narrates the story. Throughout the novel, the main character Coco grapples with herself and the identity she wants for herself. In this book, Wei Hui deliberately explores the liminal concept by incorporating Western concepts in a story set in China. This choice of writing style also symbolizes the liminality Coco experiences throughout the novel. By deliberately blurring the boundaries, the book becomes a mirror for Coco's liminal feelings and position.

In essence, *Shanghai Baby* emerges as a literary exploration of liminality, both within its narrative construction and in its impact on readers. The intentional weaving of ambiguity and cultural hybridity underscores the novel's broader commentary on the fluid and complex nature of identity in the face of cultural transitions.

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